In the sixteenth century the city of Utrecht was the ecclesiastical centre of the Northern Netherlands. In July and August 1566 the situation was intense. Preachers who propagated dissenting views of religion were not appreciated. Both the ecclesiastical and the secular authorities in Utrecht wanted to carry on in the traditional way.

Initially, this implied that the devotees of the new religion travelled to IJsselstein, Culemborg and Amsterdam where preaching sermons was allowed. But in August 1566 the believers met outside the city of Utrecht. Dirk Kater, an Amsterdam merchant living in Utrecht managed to invite Jan Arentsz, an Alkmaar wicker worker, to come to the town. Thus it came about that on the fifteenth of August, feast of the Assumption, the gospel was preached on the Loevenhoutsedijk, north of the town along the river de Vecht. Near to the Oostbroek Abbey on the eastern side, close to De Bilt, Petrus Gabriel delivered a sermon. Both localities were situated outside the town, but especially outside the jurisdiction of the town. Obviously the organizers of the meetings and the preachers proceeded with caution.

Three days later, on Sunday 18 August, a sermon was preached considerably closer to the southern side of the town, in an orchard of the national commander of the German Order near to the Tolsteegpoort (‘poort’ = gate). The preacher there was ‘Squinting Gerrit’, a degenerate-looking Premonstratensian of the Middelburg Abbey, also called Gerrit van Kuilenberg. The town-council took no action, because they were aware of the iconoclasm that happened in West Flanders. The preachers could, in practice, go their own way, because the Utrecht municipality was afraid of the plundering of the monasteries outside the walls of the town and possibly also the unprotected satellite towns (Van Hulzen, 1932, 8–22).
Of the sermons delivered at these field meetings we have no details. The points in the sermons that Squinting Gerrit raised, for example, are unknown to us. Still, we know from alternative sources, such as rhetorical drama groups, the views of these Protestant pastors. Roman Catholics used *images* and *representations* to serve as a bible for the illiterate. The Calvinists and the Mennonites, however, considered these pictures irrelevant and thought them to be idols. In their view, worshipping images was idolatry, as is stated in Exodus 20: 4–5, Deuteronomy 5: 8 and Leviticus 19: 4; and 26: 1. Images were sacrilegious, because they attempted to depict the invisible divine. Gold, silver and velvet as means to clothe or embellish the idols were condemned. Indeed, the poor who were more likely to be seen as the embodiment of Christ went naked. Also the lighting of candles in front of the images was considered sinful. ‘Give the candles to the poor who are in darkness’ was the motto. Consequently, *processions* were forbidden as well. In addition to the adoration of images, these processions were often the cause of rows and lechery (Kaptein, 2002, 28).

I do not know of any contemporary representations of conventicles. But that has not prevented us from having a clear picture of these meetings. Some other representations dating back from the sixteenth century have survived. The generally accepted view is that these events instigated the struggle for freedom from Spain. Eighteenth century illustrators of Dutch history had no scruples about depicting imaginary conventicles.

A painting, dating from 1860, by Samuel de Poorter is a case in point. On the horizon we see the Utrecht Cathedral with the tower on the left. This means that we find ourselves on the south side of the city. Therefore we may conclude that the sermon preached in the orchard near the Tolsteegpoort (see above) is depicted. Squinting Gerrit is standing on a wagon. The women are sitting on the ground. Armed men are standing by. Two noblemen on horseback are also present (Kootte, 2003, 251–253).

Better known than De Poorter’s painting is the wall chart for primary schools by J.H. Isings of 1911. We can see Castle Vredenburg to the west of the town. According to Gerard Brandt in his *‘Historie der reformatie’* (History of the Reformation) published in 1677, a meeting in the open air took place there. The illustrator suggests that the people assembled were being fired at from the castle, so that a girl was wounded. A heroic story, but not a true one. Van Hulzen, in his dissertation of